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THE FORWARD STEP IN LOUISIANA

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A few Sundays past I had the pleasure of hearing a very excellent sermon by Rabbi Saal, of St. Louis, in which he used the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate his point, and all the time he was applying it to his story I was applying it to the history of the child labor movement, putting in the place of the priest who saw the sick man, but passed by on the other side, the great organized Christian church, which, instead of bringing its united strength to bear upon this sickness of our present day civilization, passes by on the other side.

Again, as the story was told, I saw in place of the Levite, who also passed by on the other side, our great school system, with its splendid organization in every town and village and its great national and international influence, passing by on the other side instead of using its organization to make and enforce compulsory school attendance laws for the thousands of little ones who have been permitted to remain out of the schools, endangering our civilization through the illiteracy which is bound to result from such negligence.

And then I saw the National Child Labor Committee in the place of the Good Samaritan having compassion on these little ones and trying to lighten the burdens which an ignorant, selfish, self-satisfied, grasping community has laid upon our children. In thinking this question out it would seem that the organizations which had the care of the children should have been the forces which would have worked for their protection. The state, the school and the church should have been the Trinity to prevent this outrage against civilization and Christianity from ever having assumed its present proportions. The strongest reason which suggests itself to me for this lack of action is the fact that in the state, the school and the church the will of the women has not been given an opportunity to act.

Except through indirect methods the motherhood of the land has had no chance to protect what is dearer to her than all else. Had the state said it proposed to place citizenship above manufactures, had the school said an educated community was better than fine raiment or houses, had the church followed the teachings of its Great Teacher, who threatened dire results to them who did any harm unto the least of these little ones, there would have been no need for such an association as we have here to-day. But that there is need, great need, of our association is being borne in upon me more and more each day I work as a factory inspector.

Louisiana took a forward step this past year, when through legislative act a fairly good Child Labor Law was passed, but already efforts are being made by one of our largest department stores to have the entire act declared unconstitutional, thereby to side-step our forward movement.

To one who went through those seven weeks of pleading and arguing with men, most of them fathers, for a law to protect little children from the greed and neglect of those who should protect them, the merest hint that another fight is on makes the heart sick and faint, for the memory of that struggle is still fresh in our minds.

As usual, the cotton mills were the most powerful opponents, ably seconded by the canning industries. To hear the representatives of both industries, one, not knowing any better, would have been convinced that the most healthful, remunerative, educational place in the entire world in which to develop children was in a cotton mill or an oyster cannery. One fairly tingled to spend the rest of life shucking oysters or peeling shrimp.

A marvelous condition was unearthed when our Committee arrived at Baton Rouge. Our bill asked for a nine-hour work day for women and children, while another bill was introduced by the representatives of the Federation of Labor asking for a ten-hour day for women and children in mills and factory, while at the same time they introduced another bill asking for an eight-hour day for railway clerks. Of course, it is much harder work for grown men to sit in a comfortable office writing figures in a book than for women and children to stand all day watching six, eight, ten or even fifteen shuttles dashing back and forth,

getting snarled and tangled and taking many minutes to unravel, for which time lost there is no pay!

The battle raged around that nine-hour day. Finally both bills were sent to the Committee. Our bill was pigeon-holed, the Federation of Labor's bill was reported favorably with an amendment making the work day nine hours. This bill of the Federation of Labor was a striking illustration of a bill drawn in the interest of the manufacturer. In the first place, the word "mill" was conspicuous by its absence, there were absolutely no sanitary or safety regulations, and what was very significant, the penalty for any violations was so arranged that the enforcement was out of the jurisdiction of every court in the state. If that bill was drawn by a lawyer his *seeming* ignorance of the laws regulating the courts of his state should be sufficient reason to deprive him of his license, if written by a member of the House, the state should have the right to ask for his resignation—for any one so absolutely ignorant of the requirements necessary has no right to a voice in the making of laws regulating the life and health of thousands of members of society, especially that part of society whom the state does not permit to protect themselves.

Finally a compromise was effected whereby our Committee waived the nine-hour day in return for some of the provisions contained in our original bill, and on the promise of the Governor that a conference of the Governors of all the Southern states, the manufacturers, the labor organizations and representatives from the Women's Clubs would be called to agree upon a uniform work day. It gives me great pleasure to announce to this Committee that the conference will be called as soon after the Mardi Gras festivities as possible—sometime in March, I think. This compromise bill was won by just the requisite number of votes in each branch of the legislature. In the Senate we needed twenty-one votes and we got twenty-one—in the House we needed fifty-eight and we got fifty-eight. It was the most bitterly fought, longest contested bill before the legislature. It went in among the very first, and came out next to the last. In all those seven weeks a few men and women sat by the side of their very sick hope, working and talking and pleading until sometimes the very soul revolted against a state of society where it was very evident a dollar counted for more than the souls and bodies of helpless women and little children.

The results under this law are most gratifying. There is a marked change in the appearance of the children going to work; especially is this the case with the messenger boys—they are much larger and stronger looking. I want to say to the credit of our business men in New Orleans the response has been most hearty. Already we have issued 3600 certificates. The greatest trouble in getting at the correct age of the child is among the Italians. They are flocking to Louisiana by the thousands, bringing with them their dishonest methods, born into them for generations. They swear they have lost their passports, they give the wrong towns in Sicily, so it is impossible to trace their birth record. I have wondered if it would be possible to get an amendment to the immigration laws, requiring the authorities to send a list of all children under fourteen years arriving in this country to the state Factory Inspector, and from there a list be sent to each deputy inspector. I should like this point discussed.

We have several very excellent provisions in our bill. Our age certificate is all right, I know, because next to the nine-hour day it was the most bitterly fought. Another provision makes it a penalty for any employee to give warning of the approach of the inspector. Another makes it *prima facie* evidence of guilt for any child under fourteen to be seen hanging around the establishment. The bill covers every occupation but domestic and agricultural service and newsboys. Altogether we won a good bill, by a good fight, and it will take a good fight to deprive us of it. There are several men and women in Louisiana who have served long apprenticeships in charitable organizations, and we intend to prevent the need of a great deal of our present-day philanthropy by stopping the supply, and, in my opinion, child labor is one of the most fruitful sources of the need of charity.